

Reflections for Maundy Thursday evening

Welcome and introduction

Good evening, welcome to Christ Church Vicarage for our Maundy Thursday service. And a special welcome if you have found us online and you are not a regular at one of Merton Priory Teams three churches, you are most welcome.

This service has three reflections and at the end of each sections I shall pause but only briefly. I suggest you might like to pause for a little longer, to take time to reflect, if so you can go at your own pace – to do this simply pause the video, take your time.

With this service we begin the Paschal Triduum, The Three Days, that begins with our service now this evening of Maundy Thursday and reaches its high point on the Easter day.

On Maundy Thursday we remember Jesus last supper with his disciples, his betrayal and arrest. Three things stand out from the gospel accounts of that night:

Jesus companionship with his friends,

the physical actions of washing the disciples feet, the breaking of bread and sharing the cup,
and the dreadful isolation and fear that Jesus felt alone in the garden.

As we approach our worship over these next three days we do so knowing this Easter will be unlike any other we have ever experienced. We will not have our usual gathering to share the familiar rituals, we cannot share a meal together, we cannot reach out and touch each other in comfort and support, and we are all feeling the effects of isolation, fear and sorrow not knowing what the immediate future holds. And so we enter into this Easter, an Easter like no other, very aware of that separation and isolation and yet in all of this we know that, as always

The Lord is here

As we begin our worship let us call to mind those things that trouble us and come between us and God and between us and our neighbour.

Prayers of Penitence

Our Lord Jesus Christ says:

'If you love me, keep my commandments.'

'Unless I wash you, you have no part in me.'

'Let us confess to almighty God our sins against his love,
and ask him to cleanse us.

Silence is kept.

Have mercy on us, O God,
in your great goodness;
according to the abundance of your compassion
blot out our offences.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Against you only have we sinned
and done what is evil in your sight.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Purge us from our sin and we shall be clean;
wash us and we shall be whiter than snow.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

May the Father forgive *us*
by the death of his Son
and strengthen *us*
to live in the power of the Spirit
all *our* days. **Amen.**

COLLECT

God our Father,
you have invited us to share in the supper
which your Son gave to his Church
to proclaim his death until he comes:
may he nourish us by his presence,
and unite us in his love;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

A reading from John 13: 1-16 **Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet**

Reflection

Who would have thought that washing our hands could become so important? A piece of direct action against the life threatening danger. And yet we have been told it is perhaps the single most effective thing we can do, to halt the spread of the virus, and not just for our own wellbeing but for the protection of others.

Jesus washed his disciples' feet a sign that he had come not to be served but to serve. He never courted favour with those of rank and position, he chose his friends from the ordinary working people and the outcasts in society. Throughout his ministry he had been there for others and especially for the vulnerable, those least able to help themselves.

Jesus says: So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Do we lose sight of how radical a teacher Jesus is when we are confined to our churches surrounded by our familiar practices? Where do we see Jesus in action today? Is it in the prophetic voices of the climate change activists who, through their non-violent actions, confront those in power with the folly of continuing our unsustainable way of life?

Is it in the nurses and doctors who risk their lives to continue to care for everyone who is sick, even when giving that care poses a danger to themselves?

How do we serve others – perhaps not in these frontline, dramatic ways but we also serve who phone a neighbour, collect shopping for the vulnerable, look out for those who may go overlooked, hold people before God in prayer.

Prayer –

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us
that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters
we do also for you:
give us the will to be the servant of others
as you were the servant of all,

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

A reading from Luke 22.14-23 **The Institution of the Lord's Supper**

Reflection

For many Christians the Eucharist is the central act of our prayer life and worship, our most intimate connection with our Saviour. In these days when we cannot gather together and celebrate the Eucharist many are feeling lost and troubled. I wonder, and I hope that it might be the case that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder' and that our current deprivation may be seen as a way we serve.

We have been reminded by the Church of England of the importance of a Spiritual Communion. The term 'Spiritual Communion' has been used historically to describe the means of grace by which a person, prevented for some serious reason from sharing in a celebration of the Eucharist, nonetheless shares in the communion of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

When we are separated from a loved one our love for them does not weaken, indeed as I mentioned, our absence may make our eventual reunion all the more wonderful and meaningful.

In our current circumstances let us remember St Paul's words that there isn't anything in all creation, [which] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And words modelled on the prayer of St Richard of Chichester:

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Prayer –

Lord Jesus Christ,
we thank you that in this wonderful sacrament
you have given us the memorial of your passion:
grant us so to reverence the sacred mysteries
of your body and blood
that we may know within ourselves
and show forth in our lives
the fruit of your redemption,

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

A reading from Mark 14.22-26 **Jesus Prays in Gethsemane**

Reflection by Paula Gooder in *The Way of the Cross* p19

It is tempting to imagine that life was easy for Jesus' that so sure was he about who he was and who he was called to be that he faced suffering and death with calm and equanimity. It is certainly the case that at other points in the Gospels, Jesus appears to face what lies ahead with profound composure, so much so that he even prophesies about his own death on numerous occasions.

Any thought in this vein that we might have about Jesus' emotions about his death, are put firmly in their place by Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. The words used to describe how he feels here communicate an overwhelming sense of anguish, distress and grief. Indeed, against the backdrop of Jesus' composure elsewhere, his distress and agitation (which the passage implies were as much physical and verbal) must have been horrifying to behold. Even more than that, the passage makes clear that Jesus would do anything at this point to avoid what lies ahead.

It is often said that bravery is not found in people who feel no fear but in those who face their fears head-on and do it anyway. Jesus, here models for us what true bravery looks like. He knows exactly how terrible the next few days will be for him and is profoundly distressed at the prospect. Nevertheless, he agrees to face them anyway. Brave is not normally a characteristic associated with Jesus but this passage makes it clear that brave is exactly what he was.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, you entered the garden of fear and faced the agony of your impending death: be with those who share that agony and face death unwillingly this day. You shared our fear and knew the weakness of our humanity: give strength and hope to the dispirited and despairing.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

Intercessions

In the power of the Spirit let us pray to the Father through Christ the saviour of the world.

Father,
on this, the night he was betrayed,
your Son Jesus Christ washed his disciples' feet.

We commit ourselves to follow his example of love and service. We ask your blessing on all who serve in our hospitals, care homes and caring for people in the community and we give thanks for their courage and dedication. We ask that you be with those who are engaged in urgent research and we give thanks for their gifts and dedication.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

On this night, he prayed for his disciples to be one.

We pray for the unity of your Church. We ask you to build us up through the power of your Spirit that we may be a community of hope ready to face the challenges of the coming days and weeks. Make us firm in our faith eager to show your love and compassion in our hurting world

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

On this night, he prayed for those who were to believe through his disciples' message.

We pray for the mission of your Church that we may know new ways to draw close to our communities and share the light of your hope.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

On this night, he commanded his disciples to love,
but suffered rejection himself. We pray for the rejected and unloved and for those whose bonds of love
are strained at this time, because of anxiety about the future, because of the strain on their relationships
with family and friends, because of fear of illness and death in their families, may they know your peace
and comfort.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

On this night, he reminded his disciples
that if the world hated them it hated him first.
We pray for those who are persecuted for their faith.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

On this night, he accepted the cup of death
and looked forward to the new wine of the kingdom.
We remember those who have lost loved ones, who are finding it so painful at this time,
We remember those who have died that they may rest in Christ's peace

Merciful Father accept these prayers
For the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

*As our service draws to an end we remember how we would usually strip the altar and leave our
churches abandoned, today our churches are locked and we feel a sense of that desolation. And so we
go now to Gethsemane*

When the disciples had sung a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives. Jesus prayed to the Father, 'If it
is possible, take this cup of suffering from me.' He said to his disciples, 'How is it that you were not able to
keep watch with me for one hour? The hour has come for the Son of Man to be handed over to the power
of sinners.'

Christ was obedient unto death. Go in his peace.